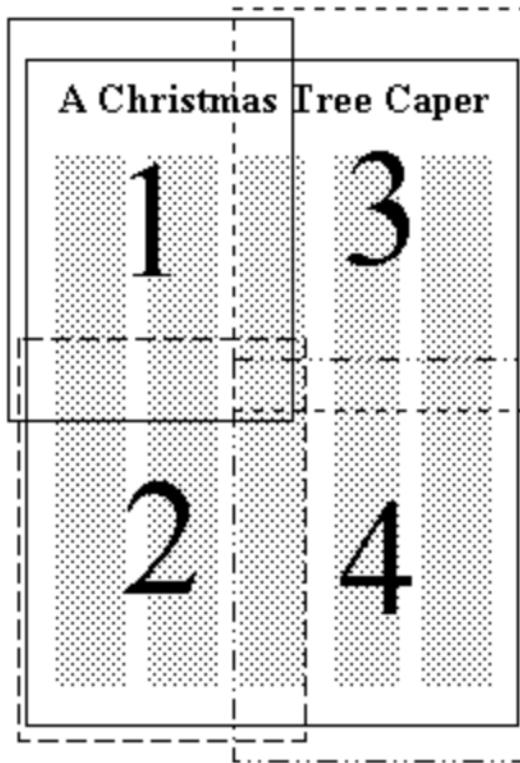


NOTE: This newspaper appearance was divided and enlarged to fill 8 ½" x 11" pages, roughly in the manner shown below.



"SUPPOSE I decide to beat Cynthia occasionally when we're married?" I asked.

"I'd be forced to fire you, my boy," Mr. Watkins said.

"How about a small frown now and then?"

Mr. Watkins shook his head negatively.

Cynthia patted me on the head. "You'll get used to it, dear. You can take up badminton or handball to get rid of your aggression."

I began pacing the office. "I don't demand much. All I want is a quiet little wife who'll do the dishes, wash the laundry, keep the house in order, and take out the ashes in winter."

Mr. Watkins smiled sadly. "Cynthia never even saw the kitchen of our place until she was 16. And that was because she wanted a drink of water."

Miss Stevens, Mr. Watkins' secretary, came into the office. She placed some business letters on his desk and waited. Miss Stevens was small and quiet and she had light-brown hair.

Jeff Reid, who shares an office with me in the Watkins Engineering Company, stretched his long legs. "I don't understand your attitude, Tom. I was born to be a parasite and I'm looking for a woman who can appreciate that in me. I love you madly, Cynthia," Jeff said, chuckling.

She studied her manicure critically. "Why all this pride in cooking and baking? Good heavens! all you have to do these days to bake a cake is to read the directions on the box of ready-mix."

Mr. Watkins grinned and looked at Miss Stevens. "Do you believe it's that simple?"

Her eyes flicked momentarily over Cynthia. "I imagine it might require some intelligence too."

TASTE-TESTS

By JACK RITCHIE

A SHORT STORY



"I refuse to be drawn into a contest."

"A coward dies a thousand deaths," I said smugly. "A heroine dies but once."

Cynthia regarded me skeptically. "One death is sufficient. Besides, I've always thought that cowards had the advantage. They have so

sighed. "Except money."

It was close to 5 when Mr. Watkins buzzed for Jeff and me. On his desk were two platters covered with cake pans. Cynthia and Miss Stevens waited expectantly on the side lines.

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Mr. Watkins grinned and looked at Miss Stevens. "Do you believe it's that simple?"

Her eyes flicked momentarily over Cynthia. "I imagine it might require some intelligence, too."

Cynthia sighed gently.

MR. WATKINS had a sparkle in his eyes. "Miss Stevens, I want you to bake a cake," he said.

Her face remained expressionless, but she blinked. "I'm afraid I left my oven at home."

Mr. Watkins appreciated the difficulty. "What I mean is for you to go home and bake a cake. Bring it back here." He looked at Cynthia inquiringly.

"No," Cynthia said firmly.

"I refuse to be drawn into a contest."

"A coward dies a thousand deaths," I said smugly. "A heroine dies but one."

Cynthia regarded me skeptically. "One death is sufficient. Besides, I've always thought that cowards had the advantage. They have so many lives in reserve."

Miss Stevens smiled. "Yes. Something like that."

War was declared.

"Very well," Cynthia said icily. "I refuse to be intimidated by a woman who would carry out ashes in the winter-time."

Jeff leaned forward. "Miss Stevens, do you believe that a husband has the right to beat his wife?"

Miss Stevens did not hesitate. "If she needs it."

Jeff watched her leave the office. "There goes a woman who has everything." He

sighed. "Except money."

It was close to 5 when Mr. Watkins buzzed for Jeff and me. On his desk were two platters covered with cake pans. Cynthia and Miss Stevens waited expectantly on the side lines.

MISS STEVENS seemed confident. "I baked a chocolate cake. Miss Watkins phoned me and said that positively under no circumstances should I make my cake chocolate." She regarded Cynthia with amusement. "I saw through that immediately," Miss Stevens said.

I regarded Cynthia suspiciously. "That was deucedly, insidiously clever of you. You know perfectly well that I'm allergic to chocolate," I said.

Mr. Watkins shook his head. "You spoiled everything with your announcement, Miss Stevens. I didn't want anyone to know which cake was baked by whom. This was to be a taste test," Mr. Watkins said.

"Just take the covers off those doggone cakes," Cynthia said. "Let's get down to business."

Mr. Watkins shrugged and lifted the two covers.

Both cakes were chocolate.

Cynthia avoided my eyes. "I'll admit that I made the phone call and it worked. But later I decided that I was being unfair." She took a deep breath. "So I decided that I might as well bake a chocolate cake, too, and keep things fair and allergic."

I STUDIED the two cakes. One apparently was near perfection. The other was almost half its height and its center was depressed. I sus-

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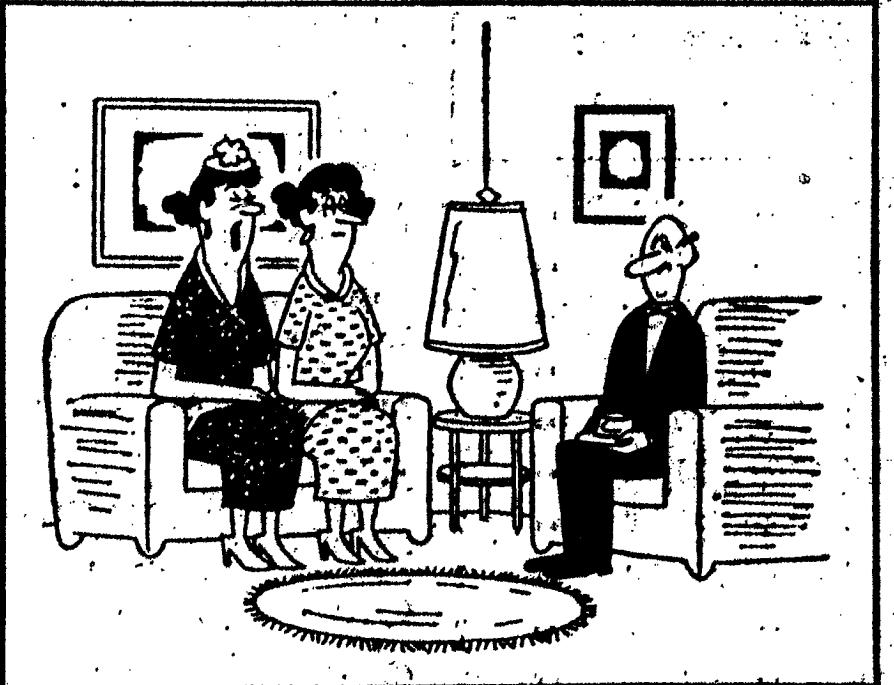
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"Lately Featon has developed quite a nice little look of defiance that's noticeable when the light is just right."

ASTE-TEST TELLS

JACK RITCHIE

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A SHORT SHORT STORY



Jeff held up his hand. "Now one moment. Let's not be in such a hurry with honesty."

sighed. "Except money."

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MISS STEVENS seemed confident. "I baked a chocolate cake. Miss Watkins

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I sighed. "When in doubt, be honest." I pointed to the agreeable-looking cake. "Exhibit A appeals to me. That is, if I could stand the stuff."

Jeff held up his hand. "Now one moment. Let's not be in such a hurry with honesty. The proof of the cake is in the eating."

whistle at me when I walk down the corridor."

Jeff kept his eyes closed. "I whistle at everybody. I like to keep in training."

Miss Stevens was almost breathless. "You can beat me any time you want to." Her eyes widened. "Why, Mr. Reid! I do believe you're blushing."

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Both cakes were chocolate. Cynthia avoided my eyes. "I'll admit that I made the phone call and it worked. But later I decided that I was being unfair." She took a deep breath. "So I decided that I might as well bake a chocolate cake, too, and keep things fair and allergic."

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pected that the frosting concealed other sins.

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Jeff held up his hand. "Now one moment. Let's not be in such a hurry with honesty. The proof of the cake is in the eating."

"Correct," Mr. Watkins said. He produced a knife from a paper bag and cut a slice from each cake.

Jeff selected the slice from the personable cake first. He took two bites, chewed thoughtfully, and returned the piece to the platter.

"Exhibit B," he said, turning to the other cake. He bit into the slice, smiled with contentment, and ate the entire piece.

He wiped his fingertips delicately with a handkerchief. "Exhibit A," he said, "is a fair cake. A good average, I might say."

Jeff turned to Exhibit B. "But here we have the real thing. No airiness, no excessive light texture. All the goodness, all the flavor, is compacted into one solid... one tight mass."

He smiled at Cynthia.

But it was Miss Stevens who was ecstatic. "I'm so glad you preferred my cake, Mr. Reid. It was the first one I ever made in my life."

THERE was painful silence and Jeff closed his eyes.

"I know that the other cake looks so much better, Mr. Reid, but I knew deep in my heart that you would select mine," said Miss Stevens, gazing raptly at Jeff. "I felt that because you always

whistle at me when I walk down the corridor."

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Miss Stevens was almost breathless. "You can beat me any time you want to." Her eyes widened. "Why, Mr. Reid! I do believe you're blushing."

"I'm not blushing," Jeff said firmly. "I happen to be allergic to chocolate, too."

I stared at the cakes again and then at Cynthia.

She buffed her fingernails on her sleeve and grinned. "I simply followed the directions on the box. Next week, lemon chiffon."

Miss Stevens moved closer to Jeff.

Jeff regarded her uneasily. "I'll never get any polo ponies this way," he said.

MISS Stevens took the initiative and when Jeff recovered he looked both surprised and happier. "Oh, well," he said. "There's something to be said about golf!"

Cynthia moved closer to me.

I was occupied for several minutes and when I looked up Mr. Watkins was munching pensively on a portion of Exhibit A.

I squared my shoulders. "There's one thing that I want understood here and now," I said firmly.

Mr. Watkins nodded. "You're the boss. Any woman who can bake like this probably has untapped resources of servile obedience. She'll welcome a firm hand."

We heat our home with oil.

But, by George, if we did have asties . . .